

**General Recreation Findings
from Hells Canyon Complex Reservoirs:
1994-2000 Onsite Interviews and 2000 Mail Survey
Technical Report E.5-4**

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1. INTRODUCTION

IPC conducted on-site interviews with recreationists in the HCC during 1994-1998 and 2000. Additionally, IPC conducted an on-site and follow-up mail survey during 2000. This report contains results from these efforts related to recreationist's demographics, activities and use patterns, open-ended comments, and responses to specific questions about management and facilities in the HCC.

The sampling technique for this study is exactly the same as used for the Recreation Use Study. In fact, the same data is used. The authors of this study (Shelby and Whittaker) are the only difference from the Recreation Use Study (Brown). Shelby and Whittaker have gone one step further in interpreting the data collected, but the differences from Brown's study are minimal. Therefore, this study review is quite redundant.

2. CONCLUSION

Pg. 17 – “The sampling strategy involved “roving” interviews, so the final sample probably has both “length-of-stay” and “group size” biases.”

BLM agrees. This bias appears to create numbers that do not always coincide with personal and professional observations.

Pg. 17 – “While some visitors may have been difficult to find or were engaged in activities (e.g., water skiing, using restroom facilities in parks) during survey periods, interviewers estimated that the proportion of these visitors was very small, probably fewer than 5% of all users.”

BLM disagrees. This is an example of a finding that does not seem accurate.

Pg. 22 – “Brownlee Reservoir had the most diverse visitors. Over the years, about 4% were Black, 4% were Latino, and 2% were Asian.”

I agree that the visitors are predominately white but if the study had extended into 2001 and 2002, I believe they would have found a much higher percentage of Black and Asian.

When crappie fishing is good, Brownlee receives much more fishing pressure from ethnic populations.

Pg. 26 – “...visitors to report the names of dispersed areas where they were staying overnight.”

This could not be an accurate assessment. Virtually no member of the public would know the name of a dispersed site because they don't exist. Even the sites with some development, such as Copper Creek and Bob Creek, didn't have names until recently. Site names are not identified as such on maps, posted on bulletin boards, nor by any other means.

Pg. 26 – “Sampling may suggest high percentages for some sites because they are primary sites in areas with only a few dispersed sites (allowing interviewers to reach more users), while other sites are more dispersed and interviewers have to cover more ground to reach them in a set sample period.”

BLM agrees. This is one of the major biases that causes less than accurate data.

Pg. 27 – “Several facilities were reportedly visited by ¼ to 1/3 of Hells Canyon users... The most-visited facilities were Hells Canyon Park, the visitor station below the dam, and Copperfield Boat Launch.... About 4 in 10 reported visiting dispersed areas along the reservoir.”

BLM disagrees. Virtually all visitors to Hells Canyon Reservoir stop at at least one site during their visit to the area. Both the Oregon and Idaho access roads dead end. Almost all visitors are in the area to specifically visit one site or another, or at least stop and look around while they are driving for pleasure. It is possible respondents to the survey did not interpret the question to mean a visit of short duration. Maybe they interpreted it to mean only where they spent the night. It seems inaccurate to estimate that only 40% of all visitors to HC Reservoir visit a dispersed site. It would be surprising if Copperfield Boat Launch were really one of the top visited facilities on Hells Canyon Reservoir.

Pg. 28 – “Readers are cautioned from over generalizing from these results, which are probably influenced by a “length-of-stay” bias due to sampling. With any “roving-based” sample, people who stay longer at a resource are more likely to be interviewed. Accordingly, our sample probably overestimates overnight and long-term users and underestimates day and short-term users.... Most visitors to the HCC reservoirs stayed overnight (over 75% in this sample).”

BLM agrees that caution is warranted. This bias seriously underestimates the visitors that are “on the move,” such as pleasure drivers, hunters, picnickers, and sightseers. In our fast paced society, many of the visitors to the HCC are making a quick visit on their way to another destination. They have a time schedule that does not allow staying in any one place for an extended period of time. BLM cannot accept the statistic that 75% of all visitors to the area stayed overnight.

Pg. 29 – “There are fewer primitive site campers who used to be campground users than campground users who used to use primitive areas. In general, this finding suggests that in the future there may be a moderate increase in demand for more developed facilities in comparison to dispersed camping.”

BLM agrees with this finding. This makes sense when considering our aging society. As the median age of recreators goes up, there is more demand for amenities and areas with firm, level footing.

Pg. 32 – “Very small percentages (usually less than 5%) report any other single activity among their primary activities. This includes swimming, boating for pleasure, picnicking, hiking, hunting, playing sports, or riding ATVs.”

As stated above, there is a sampling bias that would miss these types of users. The study was not designed to pick up anyone driving for pleasure, hunting, or any other land based activity. Plus, how would a person answer the question if they were there for one person to fish while the second person was riding their ATV? What is their primary activity, and which one is more likely to be interviewed? BLM suspects that many people responding to the question did not understand its intent. Possibly, the study does not accurately reflect the percentage of many other activities outside fishing.

Pg. 33 – “Hells Canyon Reservoir users were more likely to walk and hike than other users. Taken together, these results suggest greater visitor interest in short trails than in longer ones (although the lack of longer trails may also offer a partial explanation for these results.)

BLM agrees. Hells Canyon Reservoir is the only reservoir with an associated trail system. BLM also agrees that there is a desire for short “after dinner” trails emanating from developed campgrounds, plus short trails that would improve fishing access. If a significant, well maintained trail system paralleled the three reservoirs, I believe it would be heavily used. In other words, maybe hiking use is low because land managers have not provided hiking opportunities.

Pg. 34 – “In more recent years, with fishing success apparently lower than historical highs of the early 1990s, the proportion of visitors focused on non-fishing activities may be growing slightly (and the proportion engaged in fishing may be declining).”

BLM agrees. This is a loaded conclusion. It is possible that if the banks of the reservoirs were clean, vegetated, and welcoming, the area would attract many types of users. However, in their current condition, a desire to catch fish has to overwhelm the negative elements of their land-based activities. Hells Canyon and Oxbow both have a great deal of potential to provide a broad base of recreation use.

Pg. 35 – “...about 7 of 10 angling comments were negative (e.g., “fishing was poor”).

Of course, this statistic would be different if survey was conducted during a different set of years.

Pg. 35 – “On Brownlee Reservoir, where 21% of all comments were about water levels, the ratio of negative to positive comments was 20 to 1.”

This should not surprise anyone. Fluctuations on Brownlee are the single most impact from project operations on the recreating public. In fact, the only reason Friends of Brownlee was formed was to create a unified voice that might influence the fluctuations.

Pg. 35 – “Access issues (e.g., roads, boating facilities, trails, etc.) were the subject of about 6% of all comments, about 80% of which were criticisms. Brownlee Reservoir received more of these comments, as well as more of the negative ones...”

BLM agrees that Brownlee would garner the majority of negative comments. Maintenance of the Snake River Road, dewatered and poorly aligned boat launches, and steep slopes with no trails to get to the water are issues that we hear about on a regular basis. The fact that only 6% of all comments were about access is surprising. BLM would expect that issue to be much higher. A survey bias may be apparent. Open-ended questions do not elicit specific comments. If asked directly, “Are you satisfied with...?”, the data would probably be different.

Pg. 36 – “The vast majority of general comments were positive.... Results suggest that many users had a satisfactory experience, a consistent finding from surveys of recreation users (who chose to go to locations and do activities that they enjoy).”

This means that people who choose to recreate at these reservoirs are satisfied. What it does not explore is – why do others choose NOT to recreate here? How many people have recreated on the reservoirs once but have chosen to not return? What was there about their experience that was not satisfactory? This study is very limited in its scope and does not give us the information necessary to evaluate current and future needs of recreators.

Pg. 38 – “However, patterns suggest at least two additional findings: 1) Shade and the lack of restrooms are key issues at several locations on Brownlee Reservoir, and 2) Hewitt/Holcomb and Hells Canyon parks may have restroom shortages.”

BLM agrees. This is an excellent example of a study result that drives a PM&E. BLM is very supportive of funding for shade and restrooms.

Pg. 38 – “Hewitt/Holcomb parks and Spring Recreation Site may have greater upkeep criticism than one might expect given their use levels.”

BLM agrees with this finding. Spring Rec Site is poorly maintained. Ongoing operations and maintenance costs are beyond the capacity of BLM budgets to keep up with needs

and expectations. Many strategies are being implemented to change this situation. IPC also has a percentage of the responsibility for O&M costs.

Pg. 39 – “Considerable proportions of specific criticisms, particularly on Brownlee Reservoir, focused on water level fluctuations.”

BLM agrees. Water level fluctuations are blamed for crappie population impacts, negative and expensive impacts to boaters, creating unaesthetic mud banks, etc. This point could not be under emphasized from a recreating public’s point of view.

Pg. 41 – “Among criticisms, boat docks and launches generally received the greatest attention among specific comments... Hells Canyon Reservoir and Oxbow Reservoir users show interest in improved or additional docks or moorings; and Brownlee Reservoir users show interest in additional or improved roads and longer boat ramps... 1) Longer boat ramps are a particular issue at several upper Brownlee locations (e.g., Spring Recreation Site, Steck Park), and 3) road improvement comments are more plentiful for areas that currently have no or very poorly maintained roads (e.g., the upper and middle parts of Brownlee).”

BLM agrees. This is an excellent example of a study result that drives a PM&E. BLM is very supportive of funding for boat docks, launches, moorings, improved roads, and longer ramps. . The draft application has proposed an appropriate PM&E.

Pg. 42 – “Litter was the most important issue for those users who commented on visitor impacts.”

BLM agrees. Litter is an issue that we hear about frequently. The draft application has proposed an appropriate PM&E.

Pg. 43 – “The most common enforcement/regulation comments were about the need for more enforcement (34%), while only 1% advocated less enforcement.”

BLM agrees with this finding. However, the proposed PM&E in the draft application falls somewhat short of the expressed need. IPC has offered to provide a “forum” for law enforcement coordination and continuance of the current support of Adams County officers. The study does not address project operation impacts that establish IPC’s level of responsibility for funding law enforcement needs.

Pg. 45 – “...Brownlee Reservoir user comments about federal agencies were slightly more negative than other areas.”

This is not a surprising finding. At current funding levels, BLM management is minimal at best. The study does not address project operation impacts that establish IPC’s level of responsibility for funding operation and maintenance of non-IPC recreation sites adjacent to the reservoirs.

Pg. 46 – “The two facility types with the greatest development interest among respondents are a boat-in gas station and marina and fish cleaning stations.... Other facility types where substantial percentages report interest in increased development include places to buy food and supplies, docks, primitive camping areas, showers, day-use parking, restrooms, developed campgrounds, swimming areas, and biking/ORV trails.”

BLM agrees with all of these findings. However, the study does not address project operation impacts that establish IPC's level of responsibility for funding for these facilities. Some of the proposed PM&Es in the Draft Application address these findings, but there is not a clear link establishing percentages of responsibility.

Pg. 47 – Developed Area Attribute Importance [i.e., Spring Rec and Steck]. “The four attributes that rated as most important were being close to fishing, having shade trees, having a boat launching facility available, and being close to the reservoir.”

BLM agrees with this finding and the proposed PM&Es substantially respond to the need at Spring Recreation Site but nothing addresses needs at Steck Park.

Pg. 49 – Dispersed Site Issues. “Only one attribute was rated necessary by a majority of users (no litter). The six most important attributes are having no litter, being close to fishing access, being close to the reservoir, having trees/rocks for shade, having flat areas for sleeping, and having no problems from water levels.... Hells Canyon Reservoir users...were more interested in shade, a limit on campsites per area, scenic views, and being out of sight and sound of others.”

BLM agrees with this finding and the proposed PM&Es substantially respond to the need at the BLM dispersed sites on the Oregon shore of the reservoirs, especially along Hells Canyon Reservoir and Swede's Landing.

Pg. 58 – “Several potential conflict interactions were reported by 1/3 to nearly 1/2 of all users, including people camping too close, large groups, jet skiers, repeated encounters with the same group, and loud or rowdy people.... Relatively fewer visitors encountered swimmers at boat launches, people with or who use firearms, or people taking items from campsites. However, in the case of the latter two encounter types, one could argue that percentages should be near zero, so these percentages seem quite high.”

BLM agrees with these findings. . However, the proposed PM&E in the draft application falls somewhat short of the expressed need. IPC has offered to provide a “forum” for law enforcement coordination and continuance of the current support of Adams County officers. The study does not address project operation impacts that establish IPC's level of responsibility for funding law enforcement needs.

Pg. 59 – “The relative unimportance of 24-hour campground hosts at developed areas suggests that relatively few visitors are interested in additional enforcement at campgrounds; most of these problems are likely to be more common in dispersed areas.”

BLM disagrees with this finding. All the developed sites, except Spring Recreation Site, currently have 24-hour campground hosts and are probably responsible for the lack of interest in additional enforcement. However, professional observation would indicate that visitors are very much interested in additional enforcement outside the developed sites. The proposed PM&E in the draft application falls somewhat short of the observed need. IPC has offered to provide a “forum” for law enforcement coordination and continuance of the current support of Adams County officers. The study does not address project operation impacts that establish IPC’s level of responsibility for funding law enforcement needs.

Pg. 62 – “Most of the developed parks and facilities received relatively high ratings (typically 4.0 or higher), while dispersed areas generally received lower ratings (typically 3.5 to 3.6). ...several Brownlee Reservoir developed areas (Spring Recreation Site, Hewitt/Holcomb parks, Steck Park, and the Oasis sites) received ratings around 3.5 to 3.6, ratings that were comparable to dispersed areas rather than other parks in the HCC.”

BLM agrees with this finding. Each of these sites does not receive adequate maintenance. The proposed PM&E for Spring Recreation Site should be adequate for capital improvements but nothing addresses needs at Steck or Oasis. The study does not address project operation impacts that establish IPC’s level of responsibility for funding on-going operation and maintenance of non-IPC recreation sites adjacent to the reservoirs.

Pg. 64 – “Results suggest two primary reasons why visitors might not return: reservoir level fluctuations and long travel distances. Of these two, only the water level issue is directly affected by management or operations.”

BLM agrees with this finding. However, neither this study nor the “Reservoir Level Issues” Study addressed the question of what opportunities are there to reduce the water level fluctuations on the recreation resource. No PM&E was proposed that would affect this operations impact.

Pg. 65 – “... reservoir users are primarily focused on fishing and camping/relaxing in a natural place, although small but significant proportions also pursue other activities such as wildlife viewing, water-skiing, hiking, hunting, or swimming.”

BLM does not agree with this finding. Fishing and camping are the primary focus; the study reflects a sampling bias that under represents the number of visitors that are focused on other pursuits. Wildlife viewing and hunting are especially subject to this bias.

Pg. 66 – “Future survey work should present visitors with a list of potential key issues and have them rate their importance. Standardized responses would allow more focused analysis that could better assess the relative importance of an issue to all users and help establish when conditions have become unacceptable.”

BLM agrees with this conclusion. The proposed PM&E for Adaptive Management should incorporate this need.

Pg. 68 – “Among the more interesting development criticisms, “camping too close to others” may reflect poor campground design and screening and may be a focus for future improvements.”

BLM agrees with this conclusion. The proposed PM&Es do a good job of responding to the need.

3. STUDY ADEQUACY

This study/report is a compilation and analysis of the data collected for the Recreation Use Study 5-2. It does not contain new information, but it often draws conclusions that drive responding PM&Es. The report is adequate.

4. BLM CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS: This report tiers to Reservoir-Related Recreation Use at The Hells Canyon Complex E.5-2. The conclusions and recommendations expressed in that review would transfer to this “study”.